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ABSTRACT

Interviews with university and college department chairs or persons responsible for existing educational administration and higher education programs evaluated the effects of a merged structure (combining the two programs) on the study of administration. Sixteen universities were visited and program heads were interviewed. Identified advantages of combined programs included: better ability to keep control of the budget; better ability to keep control of student admissions; and a possible greater amount of faculty interaction with other programs and availability of more course offerings. Disadvantages were more often mentioned, and included: loss of recognition for higher education; lack of support for graduate students; lack of faculty; and lack of program control over its own budget. Budget control and losing control of admissions were the most often cited disadvantages. Several programs (n=21) that had reported being reorganized since 1982 were also examined. Overall findings showed no general positive response to curricular matters, and also no adverse effect on the study of administration could be determined from the reorganization or mergers. Contains 10 references. (GLR)

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DEPARTMENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION: THEIR EFFECT ON THE STUDY OF ADMINISTRATION

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ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Park Plaza Hotel & Towers in Boston, Massachusetts, October 31-November 3, 1991. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Beginning in the fall of 1990, the author visited 17 universities over a six month period, to study merged programs of higher education and educational administration. The study was supported by a grant from the Buhl Foundation.

BACKGROUND

The origins of higher education programs can be traced to a course in higher education at Clark University in the 1890's. However, it was during the period 1960-75 that programs in higher education flourished (Williams, 1984). In 1974, Dressel and Mayhew reported the existence of at least 67 doctoral programs. Today, that number amounts to 88 (Mason, 1990). Yet, despite that number the period of growth for higher education programs has been over for 15 years and changes have occurred.

Traditionally, higher education and educational administration programs have been separate, free standing departments within Schools of Education. In 1974 Dressel and Mayhew pointed out that the most common approach to structure was a separate department in a School of Education. Crosson and Nelson (1986) reported their surprise in discovering so many programs of higher education were part of larger academic units (74%). They reported their concern in terms of the identity of higher education as a field of study. For example, the idea that people committed to careers in academe should take some coursework in higher education, though appealing, has never gained enough support to require such courses as part of the graduation requirements for advanced degrees. Also the demand for administrators, which higher

education programs provided, no longer prevails and programs in higher education never successfully earned legitimacy as the proper source for such personnel (Williams, 1984). Townsend (1990) addressed this latter point, "the norm for administrators who have been formally prepared to deal with the increasing complexity of higher education seems obvious, yet higher education administration is one of the few professions where formal training is not usually a requirement" (p. 161).

While Crosson and Nelson were collecting data Williams (1984) was commenting that the present era has involved the merging of separate, free standing programs in higher education into departments with a wider focus. These new departments deal with issues of management, governance, policy, and similar matters not only in higher education, but also at the K-12 level. This development provoked several concerns. One of which was to articulate why higher education must remain a distinctive field of study within Schools of Education (Fife, 1988). This current study tried to determine what effect, if any, a merged structure had on the study of administration. In particular it focused on higher education no longer being a distinct department.

THE STUDY

The initial step in this study involved finding universities with both an educational administration program and a higher education program within the same department. To do this the 1990 membership list of The University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA) institutions was cross referenced against the

list of higher education programs developed by Mason (1990). Twenty-five institutions were identified and 17 of them were visited. Scheduling problems prevented visiting the other eight. Ten of the institutions visited were members of the American Association of Universities.

At each institution an attempt was made to interview the department chair, the person responsible for each program as well as some faculty from each program. This study reflects the collective responses from the interviews conducted and a discussion of how merged departments are affecting the study of administration. Finally, a brief commentary is included on the status of higher education.

RESULTS

Of the universities visited 10 of them experienced a merger before 1986, five mergers occurred between 1986-1989, and two were merged during the last two years. This is consistent with what Williams (1984) and Crosson and Nelson (1986) reported. The most common approach to structure being a separate department for a higher education program, Dressel and Mayhew (1974), appears to be a part of higher education program history.

While 17 institutions with merged programs were visited, the results are based on interviews conducted at 16 of them. This is because one university closed admissions to its higher education program and is phasing out its program as current students complete their program of studies. This closure resulted from faculty

resignations and retirements and the lack of financial resources to replace them.

Lack of full time faculty was cited by three other institutions as the primary reason their higher education program was merged into a larger unit. In each instance this represented an attempt to rescue higher education and keep it viable as a curriculum option. The most dramatic example of this was the institution that offered a higher education major, but did not actually have an academic or administrative unit named higher education. The only easily identifiable higher education faculty member is actually carried full time in another department. Student demand, in terms of students wishing to enroll, was not a problem; however, the dean of this school did not feel comfortable with higher education. As a result he "tolerated" it only as an inter-departmental program of study.

In those instances where retirements reduced personnel resources to the point that higher education could not continue to function independently it also was merged into other departments to retain it as a curricular major. In only one instance was it specifically stated that a merger took place as the result of budgetary considerations not related to personnel.

Eight institutional mergers resulted from restructuring either to "save" smaller departments or reduce the number of departments in a school. In six other institutions, all but one of which was merged in the 1970s, those individuals interviewed usually were not

aware of the reasons for their program's merger. In one other case the merger took place because a new dean "mandated it."

All of those interviewed at this institution expressed the reason behind restructuring in the same terminology. The focus was on how (Dean's mandate) restructuring came about rather than any real need or reasons for it. At one of the two institutions that merged programs in the last two years a new dean also was credited with creating the new structure. However, in this instance the reasons were well known and faculty had the opportunity to provide "significant input."

Finally, one institution did not really undergo any type of a merger. Rather its' department of educational administration created a higher education dimension, developed it into a small program, and is now in the process of modestly expanding it. Although not an actual merger, this was the only institution that provided academic reasons for having higher education and educational administration together. These findings suggest that most program mergers resulted from economic reasons, usually related to a loss of faculty rather than academic reasons.

The next area explored was the current organization of the different departments. What programs constituted these new, and not so new merged departments? Department titles were also compared. The programs most frequently found within these larger departments were: educational administration, higher education, and educational foundations. Occasionally, supervision, adult education, international/ comparative education, and policy studies

were mentioned; but not that often. Actually, policy or policy studies were more common (8) in departmental titles, than as a specific program (4). In those departments where it did exist as a program more often than not, it was still in the process of being defined, rather than an actual program of study.

Leadership was frequently mentioned in department titles as was administration, usually educational administration. Higher education was part of a departmental title in only one instance, although it was designated as a program in 15 of the 16 institutions visited.

The next area investigated concerned what advantages had resulted from creating larger departments. As discussed earlier the primary reason three higher education programs still exist is due to merging them into a larger department, when retirements and resignations significantly reduced their ranks. Another advantage mentioned by four programs concerned budget control. In one instance a higher education program retained access to obtaining independent money on its own, while three others retained either full or partial control of their program budget. They, however, were the exception. Although mentioned as an advantage it really represented "we were able to keep control of our budget," rather than a positive development resulting from the merger.

The most popular advantage cited, by six institutions, was that the program kept control of student admissions. Again note the term "keep." These were the only "advantages" cited. Other advantages undoubtedly resulted from these mergers, such as faculty

interacting with other programs and more course offerings being available to students (Norton, 1989), but they were not specifically mentioned. However, to be fair to those interviewed this question was framed more in an organizational context, rather than a collegial or curricular context.

On the other hand, disadvantages were more often mentioned. Some of these included: loss of recognition for higher education, nothing has really changed, lack of support for graduate students, lack of faculty, and the program doesn't control its own budget. These disadvantages were variously cited by a few programs. However, losing control of admissions was mentioned by eight different programs. In most instances this meant that final admissions decisions had shifted from the program to the departmental level. Though programs could make recommendations or had a representative on the department's admissions committee, the program resented not having the authority to make its own admissions decisions. Even more disliked (12 programs) was the lack of budget control. In these instances, budget control had shifted from the program level to the departmental level.

Even in those institutions where relations between the programs and the department were cooperative, programs wanted to have some budget control. Finally, in three specific instances no apparent disadvantages existed and the programs involved were working together cooperatively and were mutually supportive.

By this point having achieved some understanding of the organizational aspects of merged departments it was time to look at

what effect they had on the study of administration. The initial question addressed concerned what courses, if any, were required by both higher education and educational administration. In eight institutions there were no common courses required. In the other eight there was either a required course, usually organization theory, or a required set (two or three) of courses. In two of these institutions core courses were a school of education requirement. In the other cases it was a departmental requirement. At one institution this requirement was being revised from three required courses to a single course in educational leadership. Except for required core courses the only other courses required by both programs were research methods courses and/or some type of a dissertation preparation course.

With one exception higher education students could easily take educational administration courses and vice-versa. However, this did not appear to be actively encouraged in most institutions usually because of program requirements. Whether or not an attempt had been made to integrate courses was also looked at. One institution stated they had made such an effort, but it didn't work and they abandoned the initiative.

Finally, they were asked what revisions, if any, they would make regarding the merger. Five institutions responded none. Only two mentioned returning budget control to individual programs though 12 programs had mentioned this as a disadvantage.

At two institutions respondents felt the current dean should be fired. One institution reported it was too soon to be thinking

of revisions. The only other idea mentioned at more than two institutions was the need for additional faculty. One other institution responded "wow!", meaning they couldn't wait to begin given the chance. Finally, four chairs said that despite being merged no real changes had taken place, thus, revisions were unnecessary.

DISCUSSION

In 1989, M. Scott Norton conducted a study entitled Effects/Affects of Reorganization on Programs of Educational Administration. His study also was conducted at UCEA institutions. However, since he didn't report participating institutions actual population overlap with this study, though highly probable, is uncertain. His focus was on educational administration while this study, although somewhat broader in its approach, focused primarily on higher education. Norton's study (1989) provides some key points for comparative purposes.

The initial portion of this discussion compares our respective results to similar inquiries. Norton found "educational administration" often was included in department titles, but with more frequency than this study. That portion of his study reported data from 39 of the 48 member UCEA institutions. Another similar finding concerned departmental composition. He also found educational administration programs were usually in a department that also included higher education (26) and/or educational foundations (19).

The remainder of his study focused on 21 programs that reported having been reorganized since 1982. Specifically, he determined chair's reactions to being part of a merged department. Another point for comparison pertains to the nature of the reorganization. Norton (1989) reported five different types of reorganization with two of the most common being identical to the results of this study. Those were merging separate departments into one large department and combining several departments into a fewer number of departments.

Norton (1989) found the average number of FTE educational administration faculty to be nine. This study found the average number of full-time educational administration faculty, as opposed to FTE, to be five. These results were not reported earlier, because these data were not gathered systematically. Higher education programs had an average full time faculty of 2.5. Although these data are "soft" they accurately reflect the advantage educational administration programs have in terms of full-time faculty.

Higher education, with the exception of five programs with more than four full-time faculty, had to be more creative in staffing their programs. This usually took the form of university administrators, often with a half-time faculty appointment. In most instances this was viewed as an advantage.

At a few (less than five) institutions administrative appointments to the higher education faculty created some difficulty. However, their contributions were needed and

appreciated in most instances. Usually preventing the hiring of full-time faculty was what resulted in some tension. This was especially true at two institutions where the number of retired administrators occupying faculty slots created the impression that these programs were somewhat of an administrative "graveyard." Fortunately, these were exceptions.

Factors contributing to the reorganization also reflected similar findings: new Deans, need for smaller programs to find a departmental home, need for more faculty for educational administration to remain as a unit, and reduction of the number of weaker departments by merging them into a stronger one (Norton, 1989). Discussing findings related to advantages and disadvantages becomes more complex. In general Norton's educational administration chairs reported more advantages than were reported by the higher education chairs interviewed in this study. Of particular note was his finding that "70% of the 'chairs' indicated that more "crossover" among/between educational administration and their program components was taking place since reorganization," (p. 14).

Norton (1989) also found several problems associated with reorganized departments, such as slower decision-making and the lack of a clear department focus. However, none of his chairs mentioned either lack of budget and/or admissions control. In fact he found chairs were still "responsible for program budget matters in the large majority of cases" (p. 21). Without question Norton

found a more positive reception to reorganization in terms of administrative program conditions than this study did.

This was true in the area of budget control and suggests an area worthy of further inquiry. Control of admissions could not be compared since Norton didn't mention that area. However, it was a point of contention in this study.

With regard to Norton's other points regarding program conditions and control it is suspected, but not investigated that more similarities than differences existed. Despite that, those interviewed in this study exhibited more dissatisfaction than the chairs in Norton's (1989) study.

The next area for comparison relates to curricular matters. Norton (1989) found a broader range of course offerings resulted from reorganization. However, only 50% of students actually were taking advantage of them, many of which were new requirements resulting from the reorganization. His findings are supported by the results of this study.

Norton (1989) cautions, and these authors agree, that attributing program change directly to reorganization is problematical; however, it can be classified as an influence. With respect to the curricular concerns that Norton (1989) investigated more positive influences were reported than negative.

This study did not find a general positive response to curricular matters. Many programs expressed little change with the curriculum and those that did comment rarely mentioned such changes having a negative curricular impact. It appears that

reorganization and mergers have not had a negative effect on the study of administration. Though Norton's (1989) findings are somewhat more positive, this study's respondents seem more cautious than negative. Large segments of both populations can be characterized as going through a period of adjustment regarding curriculum and other academic matters.

In many ways the respective programs of studies for students of higher education and educational administration remain unchanged. Opportunities, however, have been created for more integration. At this time attempts to integrate are isolated, but the stage has been set. Whether higher education and educational administration take advantage of this remains to be seen. For now, with the exception of two or three institutions, the respective programs are co-existing in an environment that does not adversely effect the study of administration.

To this point in the discussion the focus has been on comparing the results of this study with those of Norton (1989). Now it is time to focus more on higher education. As reported the reaction of higher education towards reorganization was not as positive as their colleagues in educational administration, especially about administering the department.

In this area, especially regarding to how reorganization affected program administration, admissions management is a real concern. It is difficult to judge the influence higher education faculty exert in a departmental admissions committee, but given the

amount of concern expressed by those in that situation it appears to be a problem searching for a solution.

One approach used by an institution in this study dealt with this problem, by creating both program and departmental admissions committee. The program committee was responsible for reviewing and selecting applicants, while the department committees responsibilities were limited to evaluating and reviewing admissions policy. Issues like this and other administrative concerns need to be addressed and resolved at each institution. This is especially true regarding budget and other administrative arrangements resulting from mergers. In reality most programs visited were in good organizational health, except for academic personnel.

In nine of the institutions visited, despite some unique local mathematics, the number of full-time faculty assigned to the higher education program were two or three. Nelson (In Press) estimated full-time higher education program faculty to be four, Townsend (1990) found 3.7 and Mason (1990) found three. Numbers of faculty are often subject to question, but note that all of the above figures are less than this study's findings of five full-time faculty for educational administration. Despite which figures you accept higher education has not adequately addressed one of Dressel and Mayhew's (1974) concerns "that many programs in higher education have only one or at the most two professors assigned full-time to them" (p. 110). Remember this study found more than half of the institutions visited with two or three full-time

faculty, one institution's program closed, and three institutions where programs were merged to maintain higher education as a curricular major. Though some overlapping exists among these programs at least three additional programs are vulnerable due to faculty retirements.

Nelson (In Press) found 50% of the higher education professorate more than 50 years of age and estimated their average age to be 59.8. Given this aging professorate and the number of institutions with such a modest number of faculty it appears that higher education programs are likely targets of opportunity for cost cutting administrators.

Add to this picture Newell and Morgan's (1983) view that "the field of higher education is still an academically dispersed profession" (p. 69). Also add Townsend's (1990) finding "that a substantial number of higher education doctoral students are convinced that higher education was a poor field of study because the degree has not advanced their career as much as hoped" (p. 79). Finally, Townsend (1990) believed "that it is ironic that a field of study which teaches the importance of curriculum planning would be so remiss in its own curriculum development" (p. 194).

Findings from these different studies suggest higher education program's academic credentials are subject to question. Its "dispersed faculty" (Newell & Morgan, 1983) and general understaffing also detract from its image. This study's finding of vulnerability to resignation and retirements adds yet another troublesome dimension. Mergers and reorganization have tended to

save higher education programs rather than dilute them. It also suggests that higher education's situation is precarious. Other forces seem to influence the study of administration more than mergers. Yet to be fully explored is whether programs can transcend administrative control issues.

COMMENTARY

This paper has presented a number of the problems facing higher education both as programs and as a field of study. The references cited discuss in more detail some of them. Few would argue that higher education is facing perilous times. Newell and Morgan's (1983) call to "imaginatively address emerging professional problems, concerns, and opportunities if we are to retain the development of an academic field that is still on tenuous ground" (p. 83) represents an unanswered challenge that is even more critical today. Given current conditions the alternative is to explore how educational administration and higher education might best differentiate and integrate their respective disciplines in the larger departments in which they now find themselves. The remaining question is what role, if any, the Association for the Study of Higher Education is willing to assume in shaping and addressing this issue?

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